



Buying Clinic

Whether you're looking for new kit or want to improve your existing hardware, you'll always find the very best advice at the Buying Clinic – where you never spend more than you have to

CONTACT

BUYING CLINIC

If you need buying advice on hardware and software, write to:
Buying Clinic
Computer Shopper
 30 Cleveland Street
 London W1T 4JD
 or email:

clinic@computershopper.co.uk

COMPONENTS COOLING EQUIPMENT

HOW DO I COOL MY DESKTOP CASES?

Q I have two PCs that I built myself. Both use desktop-style cases rather than the usual tower case design. I don't like tower cases as they have to be hidden under a desk, making it difficult to plug things in.

One PC uses an Athlon XP 3000+ processor and the other has an Athlon XP 2500+. The 2500+ is overclocked, with its frontside bus running at 200MHz. My problem is cooling. I've inserted a cyclone fan into the cases, but both systems are overheating. Both chips are cooled using the original AMD heat sink and fan.

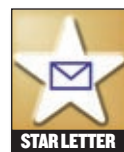
I don't want to use water cooling, as I don't like the idea of mixing water and expensive electronics. I've seen many processor coolers, including those with heat pipes, but I just don't know which would cool down my computers effectively. I don't want flashing lights.

I'm prepared to take drastic steps to get my computers running properly again. What would you suggest is the most effective solution?

Lionel Smith

A Your combination of desktop PC cases and overclocked processors is likely to cause problems. Tower cases might be ungainly, but the larger space inside allows air to circulate more easily, keeping everything cool. If you want to overclock your processor we would recommend a sizeable tower case with 12cm fans pulling air through to cool the motherboard. A side vent directly above the processor can help as well.

We'd also recommend changing the way you cool your processors. If you stick with your desktop cases this could cause problems, as the most effective coolers tend to be quite large. The Arctic



STAR LETTER

► Arctic Cooling's Copper Lite is great value at just £12 including VAT



Cooling Copper Lite (Socket A), which we reviewed in *What's New*, October 2005, is cheap, quiet and more efficient than the standard cooler, but should fit in most cases. It's also devoid of flashing lights. Akasa's AK-827-GN is also an effective cooler, but it glows an unattractive shade of green.

Finally, don't rule out water cooling. It's efficient, quiet and safe to use as long as you install it with great care.

OPERATING SYSTEM BUYING ADVICE

IS XP PROFESSIONAL NECESSARY FOR VIDEO EDITING?

Q I'm buying a new PC for video editing and have chosen the specification. However, I'm a little confused about the operating system. I don't know whether to go for Windows XP Home or Professional. I've been advised to buy Professional but I don't know if this is correct. Which one is better?

Graham

A The basics of each product are identical. Windows XP Professional has some extra features that are unlikely to be needed by a home user. These include support for corporate networks, better security for files, support for multiple processors and the remote desktop tool.



You're unlikely to use any of these features and would be paying over the odds to upgrade to Windows XP Professional. There's no difference in performance between the two versions either, as both work at the same speed.

◀ Windows XP Home Edition will be good enough for most users' needs

NOTEBOOK HOME USE

WHICH DOCKING STATION DO I NEED?

Q I have a notebook that I carry around a lot. However, when I get back home I'd like to be able to connect it to a base station so I can leave all my peripherals plugged in. Can I buy any docking station or do I need a specific model?

David Walker

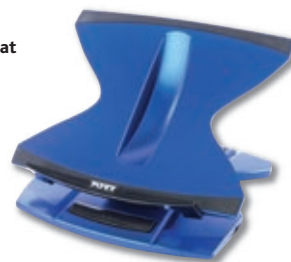
A Docking stations are made specifically for certain models of notebooks, so you can't just buy any model and hope it will

work. Typically, docking stations are available only for business-oriented notebooks made by large manufacturers such as IBM and HP.

This doesn't mean that you're completely stuck, though. We'd recommend buying a USB hub and plugging in USB peripherals, including a keyboard and mouse. When you get home, you just have to plug your hub into your notebook to get all your peripherals working. USB hubs can be bought for as little as £10 including VAT from www.microdirect.com.

► The Ergo Station holds your notebook at a comfortable angle

Alternatively, you can buy a product such as Port's Ergo Station. This has a four-port hub and holds your notebook at such an angle that you can use its screen comfortably at a desk without having to plug in an external monitor. It costs £60 including VAT from www.expansys.com.





GRAPHICS CARD BUYING ADVICE

WHICH GRAPHICS CARD FOR GAMES?

Q I'm in the middle of upgrading my PC. I want to change the motherboard and processor, and I'm considering an Athlon 64 processor and a motherboard to match, but I'm a student on a tight budget. The motherboard I want has an AGP 8x slot rather than PCI Express, and I was planning to use an old nVidia GeForce 4 TI 4200 graphics card.

However, this card can't produce a screen resolution above 1,024x768. Is there a graphics

card costing less than £100 that provides higher resolutions, as well as running the latest games?

James Taylor

A NVidia's GeForce 4 TI 4200 graphics chipset is looking a little old these days. This month we've reviewed dozens of reasonably priced AGP graphics cards in our Labs test on page 178. For around £70 including VAT you could buy a card such as the 256MB Sapphire

► The Sapphire Radeon X700, priced around £70, will play the latest games at reasonable resolutions



Radeon X700. This is capable of playing the latest games at reasonable resolutions and frame rates. It will also provide higher resolutions when working in Windows.

Alternatively, by stretching to £107 you could buy a Leadtek 6600GT AGP card. This is an excellent card for 3D gaming and it ran our Doom 3 test almost twice as fast as the X700.

NOTEBOOK GRAPHICS CHIP

WHAT SORT OF GRAPHICS CHIP SUITS MY NEEDS?

Q I'm buying a notebook that I will mostly be using for photo editing. I'm getting a little confused with the choice of graphics chips available, though. Will a Mobility Radeon X300 chip suffice or do I need a more powerful GeForce 6800-based notebook?

Raymond Martin

A Graphics chips on notebooks and desktop PCs make a significant difference only when you're playing 3D games. For Windows tasks, they're all pretty much the same. Some may give you higher resolutions, but that's only relevant to notebook users should you plug in a large external screen. If you're not interested in playing games, the choice of onboard graphics shouldn't make a difference and the Mobility Radeon X300 is more than sufficient.

Before you rush out and buy anything, though, there are some other things that you

▲ The Acer Ferrari 4005 WLMi has 1GB of RAM, a 100GB hard disk and a widescreen display



should consider. The first is storage space. If you're going to be storing a lot of images on your notebook, make sure you get one with at least a 60GB hard disk. If you can stretch further, 80GB or 100GB disks are even better.

Second, the amount of memory you have is very important. We recommend at least 512MB. If you can afford it, 1GB of memory is even better, particularly if you're going to be working on multiple large image files.

Finally, you'll want a notebook with a large enough screen. A 15" display will allow you to see the fine detail on your digital snaps. The Acer Ferrari 4005 WLMi in our Hotlist (see *What's New*, page 18) satisfies all these requirements and is available for £1,200 including VAT from www.acernotebooks.co.uk.

POWER SUPPLY SPECIFICATION

DO I NEED MORE POWER?

Q I'm upgrading my PC and I have decided on an AMD Athlon 64 FX57 processor and two graphics cards using SLI. I also know which motherboard I want to use, but I'm not sure about the power supply. My current model is 380W. Is this good enough for a powerful system?

Daniel Busby

A Trying to run two powerful graphics cards will overload your existing power supply. In fact, nVidia recommends a minimum of a 450W power supply in any SLI system.

Power supply manufacturers have started releasing supplies designed specially for SLI. We reviewed Enermax's 535W unit in *What's New, Shopper* October 2005 and gave it a Best Buy award. This costs £69 including VAT from www.chilliblast.com. It comes with two PCI-E connectors for your graphics cards, so you don't have to mess around with extra adaptors.

INTERNET WEBSITE CREATION

CAN I BACK OUT OF FRONTPAGE?

Q I use Microsoft FrontPage 2003 to design websites but I'd like to move to another program. I've designed some websites using FrontPage extensions, but they won't work on my web server unless I pay more money to my hosting company. Can I export them to another design program?

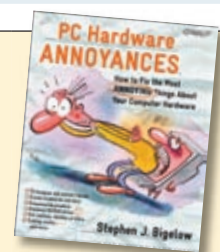
Abdulazeez Idiara Ilorin

A Unfortunately, there's no simple way to export websites made using FrontPage extensions to another program. To use FrontPage extensions you need to have Microsoft FrontPage installed on your PC, and the web server needs to run the extensions software. Many cheaper web-hosting packages charge customers more to have access to these extensions. It's probably better in the long run to move away from extensions and build your website without them.

If you've used extensions to help manage the structure of a large website, changing to another system could require either a redesign or a database to manage the location of each page. If you've only used extensions for a few bells and whistles, such as a page counter, you should be able to replace them with simple server-side scripting using ASP, PHP or Perl, or even JavaScript.

If you want an HTML editor that can view the code of your pages, we'd recommend Macromedia's Dreamweaver, which is powerful enough to design and manage complicated sites. However, it costs around £350 including VAT. If you don't want to spend that much, Namo WebEditor also allows you to edit the underlying HTML code and costs around £50 including VAT. Finally, don't forget that even the most complicated websites can be created using a simple, free text editor such as Notepad, once you are proficient with HTML. **CS**

WIN



PC Hardware Annoyances

If you send our star letter, you'll receive a prize. This month's winner gets a copy of O'Reilly's *PC Hardware Annoyances*, which will help you fix any hardware problems your PC is experiencing. If you don't want to spend the rest of your life troubleshooting, keep this book next to your PC along with the latest copy of *Computer Shopper*. You will find that all your PC woes disappear.